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# The Kurdish Issue in Turkish Public Opinion

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ONE OF THE MAJOR GROUNDS for hope for a peaceful solution to Turkey's Kurdish problem is its relatively advanced stage of political development. At least three critically important qualities already exist in Turkish political culture: democratic process and governance, the existence of a large and vibrant civil society, and an open press. In each of these areas there is something left to be desired, but these characteristics nonetheless function quite impressively by any regional standards, including those of most of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Unfortunately, these institutions have not functioned well in terms of handling the Kurdish problem. The Kurdish problem seems to fall well outside most of the normal processes of Turkish government and society. To put it another way, Turkey's democratic features are largely nonfunctional when it comes to the Kurdish issue.

### Parliament and the Political Parties

Turkey has a functioning democratic order, in the sense that governments now regularly come to and leave power in accordance with an electoral process derived from the constitution. Turks actually believe that their lives

can be changed by elections—an important sign of democratic principles at work at the grass roots. While the democratic order is far from perfect, it is increasingly solidly established; public opinion now exerts major impact on how Turkey conducts its policies.<sup>1</sup> In parliamentary terms, Kurds happen to occupy nearly one-third of the seats in the Turkish parliament. Yet only a handful of Kurdish deputies in the parliament have been willing to speak out at all on the Kurdish problem. Why so?

We noted earlier the extreme difficulties that have existed for anyone even talking about the existence of a Kurdish problem. To speak about Kurds was to run the risk of violating the constitution on the grounds of encouraging separatism. Hence Kurdish deputies, elected from primarily Kurdish regions, avoided directly addressing the problem, preferring at best to work behind the scenes or simply to focus upon the economic betterment of their regions. Even today, despite the emergence of a series of explicitly Kurdish parties, the parliament has yet to undertake a debate of the Kurdish issue *per se*. Kurdish-oriented parties such as the People's Labor party (HEP) and its successor, the Democracy party (DEP), were banned in quick succession over the last three years. Their successor, the People's Democracy party (HADEP), has had a tenuous hold on life. These parties have all walked on extremely thin ice and are vulnerable to accusations of constituting a separatist, or a PKK-affiliated, party.

Still, there have been occasions on which the Parliament has attempted to investigate developments in the southeast. Such efforts have not amounted to much, as they have tended to become political footballs among the various parties. One such effort was a parliamentary commission that submitted its findings in October of 1994. While timid in its criticisms of governmental policy and putting the blame for the ills of the region almost entirely on the PKK, the commission's report, nonetheless intimated the difficulties ordinary citizens experience at the hands of the security forces and the lack of interest on the part of both the public and private sectors. It even suggested that the operations of the security forces could resolve only 25 percent of the problems, while the remaining 75 percent had to be addressed within the state structure and its representatives operating in the region.<sup>2</sup> The two dissenting members' comments, by contrast, took the report and the commission to task. One of them even suggested that the report did not conform with the style of a parliamentary investigation, but rather with that of "a state-issued one." He went on to criticize the report for failing to mention, incredibly, that the southeastern

problem was caused by the different ethnic origins of the region's inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

Turkey's major parties have acted with a great deal of caution with respect to this issue. They have by and large differentiated between their own specific policy prescriptions and what they have termed as "state policy." By state policy, politicians mean the combination of the preferences of the civilian and military bureaucratic elite and the ideological precepts of Kemalism: Turkish nationalism and the maintenance of a centralized unitary state. Few if any among the mainstream parties engage in any revisionist thinking about the nature of the Turkish state. While substantial differences exist among them on issues such as taxation, privatization, worker's welfare, and so on, there are no deep philosophical divides; what is being argued is a matter of degree—and of course, personalities.

The two major exceptions on the Turkish political scene today are represented by the Islamist Welfare (Refah) party and the New Democracy Movement (Yeni Demokrasi Hareketi, YDH), both of which approach their understanding of Turkey from quite new and independent positions. The two parties ended at the opposite ends of the election results in December 1995: Welfare emerged as the single largest party, while YDH withered away.

### **The 1995 Elections**

At the outset, the post-1995 election period augured well for the Kurdish question. HADEP's results, as discussed earlier, while not satisfactory by any means, nonetheless did give a boost to HADEP itself and did indirectly help legitimize the party in the eyes of the public. Despite the poor showing of Cem Boyner's YDH and the relative disappointment for HADEP, the elections provided an opportunity to discuss the Kurdish question. The social democrats, the Republican People's party (CHP), had for years engaged in a battle, fought mostly from within the government, that produced scarce little. This was due to the fact that they opted to become the minority party in a coalition with Tansu Çiller's, the one party that has embraced the "state policy" wholeheartedly. Both the CHP and ANAP went out of their way to emphasize the fact that they would seek a peaceful solution to this problem. While these can be interpreted as cynical efforts at minimizing Welfare's pull in the southeast, ANAP's statements

were significant in that the party used them to differentiate itself from the ruling DYP. Even the DYP, which hitherto had been the architect of an uncompromising policy, can be said to have discovered the problem of the southeast.

The absence of a clear winner (see Table 4.1) in these elections meant that Turkey was immersed into a period of coalition formation. Welfare's first-place finish, while not a shock, posed a strange dilemma: Divisions within the center-right and center-left made it very difficult for a coherent government to emerge from the mainstream parties. Consequently, either one of the two center-right parties had to initiate a timid dance with the Islamists. ANAP chose to go first, drawing the ire of the secular forces around the country and the military. Such pressure convinced the center-right to form a minority coalition supported by the larger of the two center-left formations, the Democratic Left party of Bülent Ecevit.

The ANAP-DYP coalition did not survive long, as allegations of financial improprieties and parliamentary investigations fielded by Welfare against Çiller brought the government down. In a surprising turnaround, it was Welfare and DYP that in June of 1996 put together a rotational coalition agreement that envisaged that Erbakan would be prime minister for the first two years, to be followed by Çiller. By June 1997, this coalition government had succumbed to pressure from the military and other establishment forces and resigned.

**TABLE 4.1**  
**Distribution of Seats in the Turkish Parliament**

<i>Party Name</i>	<i>% of votes</i>	<i>seats 12/95</i>	<i>seats 7/96</i>	<i>seats 4/97</i>
Welfare	21.3	158	159	160
Motherland	19.7	125	130	127
True Path	19.2	135	120	120
Democratic Left	14.6	76	75	68
Republican People's	10.7	49	49	49
Great Unity*		7	7	7
Great Turkey			1	7
Independents			8	10
Vacant				2

\*Elected as part of an alliance with the Motherland party

### **The Islamist View: The Welfare Party and Others**

The position of the Welfare party on the Kurdish question, as on many other questions, is of immense interest not just for Turkish politics but also for the region, since it represents the first Islamist party to come to power by the ballot box in the Middle East. On the surface, the Welfare party's vision of the Kurdish question has always been at odds with that of the mainstream parties—which was not necessarily very meaningful while Welfare had been in the opposition. But now Welfare had come to power. The Welfare party and Islamists in general view the Kurdish issue as a problem created by the state, based on the decision to use Turkish nationalism as the sole foundation of the new state, a policy that deliberately excluded and alienated the Kurds from the Turkish republic. To them, ethnic divisions are artificial; the Welfare party naturally contends that if Islam had formed the foundation of the state, the Kurds would not have felt excluded. Accordingly, a return to the Islamic identity in Turkey will comfortably accommodate both Kurdish and Turkish peoples. Welfare party members argue that the Kemalist state, by discriminating against both Kurds and Muslims, created a bond between the two groups.<sup>4</sup> With these criticisms of the state's founder, Atatürk, the party has tried to distance itself from the mainstream parties and appeal to Kurds. In fact, one observer suggests that Erbakan and his people deliberately avoid direct references to the Turkish people and insist on using substitutes, such as “our dear people” or “our dear people's valuable children.”<sup>5</sup> Because of the belief in an overarching Islamic umbrella, the Welfare party and Islamists appear not to be threatened by non-Turkey identities and, therefore, have not had to deny the existence of Kurds, as have mainstream parties.

Still, the Welfare party's discourse is tame in comparison with that of Islamist intellectuals and activists. The reemergence of the Kurdish question in the 1980s has enabled Islamists to sharpen their critique of the Kemalist state they abhor. For them, the ideal arrangement was the previous one: The Ottoman Empire, in which all Muslims were equal irrespective of their ethnic background. In fact, the problems started with the intrusion of the West, specifically with the Tanzimat reforms in 1839 and the idea of the unitary state.<sup>6</sup> The theme that today's imperialist powers, just as they did in the past, use the Kurds to sow dissension among Muslims is a theme that permeates the writings and thinking of the Islamist camp, including the Welfare party.

Beyond this, Islamist thinkers have repudiated the concept of the nation state. Ali Bulaç argues for instance that, just as with the Kurds, he does not believe in Palestinians, the Polisario, and Kashmiris creating their own states.<sup>7</sup> This is because an independent Kurdish state in Iraq, for instance, would distance the Kurds from the logic of integration with Islamic societies. On the other hand, Kurds must be protected from the assimilationist policies of Turks and Arabs,<sup>8</sup> because he does believe that Kurds are a separate people endowed by God with a different culture and language.<sup>9</sup> Another such thinker, Abdurrahman Dilipak, goes even further in arguing that the Kemalist concept of nationalism has been vanquished and that the time has come to return to the Ottoman-style “millet” system.<sup>10</sup> Islamist publications have been more aggressive on this issue, and they have also not shied away from criticizing the Welfare party. In a series of articles on this question, for instance, Selami Camci has pointed out that while some of Welfare’s theses regarding foreign intervention and the like are undoubtedly correct, the party fails to realize the complexity of the problem and specifically the fact that Kurdish nationalism is a natural outcome and is not about to disappear any time soon.<sup>11</sup> As sympathetic as they may appear to the Kurds, Islamists themselves are nonetheless wary of the international connections that Kurds, specifically Iraqi Kurds, have formed over time. Most worrisome to them are the politics of both Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq, who have had extensive dealings not only with Western powers but also with Israel.<sup>12</sup>

The Welfare party has incorporated into its discourse many of the ideas discussed above to attract the support of Kurds nationwide: It has consistently advocated the elimination of the Emergency Rule in the southeast, expressed its desire to resolve matters peacefully, emphasized the unity of all under Islam, worked for the liberalization of restrictions on language, and sent teams periodically to the southeast to investigate matters and produce reports. In the process, unlike other parties, it did not declare itself an enemy of a Kurdish identity; even Erbakan has occasionally mentioned Kurdish identity.<sup>13</sup> Although the party has been careful not to overly criticize the military’s conduct of the conflict in its reports, it has, nonetheless, suggested that the people of the region have suffered unnecessarily. In its 1994 report, it argued that a large segment of the populace in the region are treated as potential suspects, and that residents were being forced out of their villages.<sup>14</sup> A 1996 report similarly argued that state officials were mistreating the inhabitants of the southeast.<sup>15</sup> In another far-reaching re-

port, in addition to the steps outlined above, the party called for the election of provincial governors, the transformation of provincial assemblies into "state" assemblies, implying a federal structure of sorts, and the elimination of State Security Courts.<sup>16</sup>

As a party that has already attracted the ire of the state establishment in other respects, Welfare is careful of the limits it can reach on the Kurdish question.<sup>17</sup> Most of the reports mentioned above are produced by delegations sent by Erbakan to the southeast and are submitted to him and the party leadership, who are under no obligation to accept the recommendations; but they do make good press copy and show that the party is attempting to grapple with the issue.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, writers who are sympathetic to the party have no qualms about arguing what they think is the obvious: The Welfare party perceives the issue as composed of three dimensions: the southeastern problem, the Kurdish question, and terrorism. While the southeast has been economically ignored over the years, the Kurdish issue is one of identity, and Welfare's aim is to attack all three problems simultaneously since they are intimately linked.<sup>19</sup>

As a result, Welfare has achieved a modicum of success: Hamit Bozarslan suggests that the party has managed to create an organic link with the Kurdish national movement through the religious orders that are so prevalent among the Kurds. It has succeeded in incorporating among its ranks not just Kurds, as other parties have, but even bona fide Kurdish nationalists.<sup>20</sup> As argued earlier, it has also benefited from the Islamic and socially conservative nature of the southeast—after all, the first Kurdish revolt of the republican era, the Shaykh Said rebellion, contained both religious and nationalist characteristics. The party had already made important headway among the Kurds in the 1970s. In the 1973 elections, the National Salvation party, Welfare's precursor, won 11.8 percent of the national vote and, with forty-eight members in Parliament, emerged as the fourth largest party. By 1977, it had lost half of its parliamentary delegation, receiving 8.6 percent of the vote, although the total, absolute number of votes remained constant. Between 1973 and 1977, however, it appears that the party consolidated its position in the southeast. Whereas in 1973 only one Kurdish province, Bingöl, figured among the top ten provinces, by the 1977 elections eight of the top ten and nine of the top eleven were unambiguously Kurdish provinces.<sup>21</sup> In recent years, the travails of DEP and HADEP have served the Islamists well: In the 1994 municipal elections, their absence allowed Welfare to sweep the southeast's municipali-

ties. In 1995, HADEP's performance notwithstanding, it elected a number of representatives from the southeast to Parliament.

Success, however, comes at a price. With its not-so-subtle anti-Kemalist discourse, the party has anointed itself as a "countersystem" (*düzen karsiti*) political formation and, therefore, it is well poised to receive Kurdish votes and activists in search of such an alternative to the "statist" and "PKK-oriented" parties. And it has. Many of its supporters and activists in the southeast are fierce Kurdish nationalists, who (as argued in the section on Islam and the Kurds, above) see in the Welfare party an opportunity to push the political system further and democratize it, or even upset it. This creates a dilemma for Erbakan and the party leadership: While the party is now home to a large Kurdish contingent at both the national and local levels, there are also other and more dominant currents within it. Not everyone in the party shares the concerns of those in the southeast. In fact, quite naturally, many of the Islamists have criticized government policies in the southeast just because they were in the opposition. With Welfare having come to power as the senior member of a coalition, these tensions are bound to become more pronounced as the party tries to accommodate these factions to the necessities of governance.

Another interpretation of Welfare's ideology suggests that it is inherently "statist" in its own right. In other words, despite its call for the strengthening of local administrations, it does not look to the dismantling of state authority, but rather its reformulation along Islamist principles. While Welfare may have fewer problems than other parties on the question of a Kurdish identity within the state, it is equally unlikely that Welfare would tolerate any weakening of the central state in the name of accommodating any kind of nationalism. To all Islamists, nationalism is not a positive force, since in most cases it works to divide the Muslim community, the *ummah*. Welfare would therefore probably yield much on questions of expression of Kurdish identity, but very little by way of decentralization of state power, and it would move aggressively against actual separatism. Its economic approach to the southeast is reminiscent of its rhetoric of the 1970s, when it argued for state-sponsored investment almost everywhere. In other words, the Islamist focus would remain on the coherence of state power, and not on the nationalist Turkish basis of state power.

One cannot minimize the importance Islam plays in the shaping of Welfare's worldview. It has to this day articulated a consistently anti-Western discourse when it comes to Western policies and intervention in the Mus-

lim world; it has sided, almost automatically, with countries that the West has for one reason or another imposed sanctions on or criticized, especially if they are Islamic. On Iraq, for instance, despite Saddam Hussein's violent suppression of the Kurds, whose rights Welfare supposedly champions, Erbakan has been a vociferous advocate of lifting U.N. sanctions, opening border posts, and removing Operation Provide Comfort, the U.S.-led Turkey-based military force that monitors and safeguards the Kurds of northern Iraq. In the 1995 election campaign, he argued for the creation of an Islamic NATO, Islamic Common Market, Islamic U.N., and so forth.

Yet, despite Islamist rhetoric, the Welfare party, even its previous incarnations in the 1970s, has exhibited strong nationalist tendencies. Erbakan is first and foremost a Turkish nationalist: His Islamic orientation reflects his preference that Turkey ought not play a secondary role in a Western-run world order. His approach to the Islamic world also betrays a desire for Turkey to lead and even dominate it. In fact, his and his party's approach to both foreign and domestic policy strongly suggest that they are Ottomanist in inclination. Erbakan envisages a strong Islamic Turkey leading the way for all Islamic countries.

In this configuration or vision of Turkey, it is unlikely that the Welfare party would be willing to agree to reforms on the Kurdish question that extend beyond the "cultural" realm while simultaneously acknowledging a separate Kurdish identity.<sup>22</sup> A Welfare parliamentarian, involved in many of the party's ventures in the Kurdish question, in defending why Kurds should have all the cultural rights they seek while remaining part of the Turkish republic, argued, "The creation of an Islamic union requires the leadership of Turkey. The Turkey that engages itself in this duty cannot be a smaller or a divided country, quite on the contrary. . . . To divide Turkey is the greatest injustice that can be done not just to the 60 million people living in Turkey but to all of the Muslims and peoples of the world."<sup>23</sup> Resolving the Kurdish problem à la Welfare, therefore, may be nothing more than a gateway to greater glories.

There is, however, one potential bottleneck, and that is the Kurds themselves. Given the competition for these votes between Welfare and HADEP, Welfare's strategy of capturing and holding onto Kurdish votes depends on one of the following scenarios being realized. In the first scenario, HADEP, or for that matter any other Kurdish-based mass political party, is prevented from participating in elections. Then, Welfare is quite likely to sweep the southeast and all other localities where Kurds live in

large numbers.<sup>24</sup> Had there been no national 10 percent threshold blocking HADEP's entry into parliament, Welfare's representation in the southeast would have been seriously reduced, perhaps by as much as fifteen seats. In the 1995 elections, with HADEP running, Welfare lost votes in all Kurdish provinces except Bingöl, where it actually increased its share.<sup>25</sup>

Alternatively, stiff competition from the likes of HADEP means that while in power, Erbakan and his colleagues had to demonstrate that they can change the lives of ordinary citizens in the southeast. It is not just future Kurdish votes that are at stake here but also the cohesion of the party. While there are thirty-four Kurdish members of the party, a group of ten to fifteen are active supporters of the Kurdish cause, both in Turkey and Iraq.<sup>26</sup> These Kurds do not necessarily share Welfare's vision of an Ottomanist Turkey but tend to judge Erbakan on how well he performs in the southeast.<sup>27</sup> They were also at odds with the rest of the party on issues such as the extension of Operation Provide Comfort. While the party in general saw it as an extension of Western influence, many of these Kurdish parliamentarians wanted it to be extended.<sup>28</sup> Just as there are nationalists among these Kurdish parliamentarians, there also are Islamists who tend to attach more or equal importance to the idea of Islamic unity when compared with ethnic considerations. As a result, the Kurds in Welfare have been unable to organize a common front against the party's leadership or its policies.

The Kurdish vote is vital to Welfare if this party is ever going to become a majority party, or at least one with a sizable plurality. As the decision to align himself with Turkish nationalists in 1991 and HADEP's relative success in 1995 demonstrated, Erbakan cannot take the Kurdish vote for granted. Therefore, by becoming prime minister, he also got a chance to extend this base further. Irrespective of the sensitivities of establishment forces in society, such as the military, he still needed to strike a delicate balance within his own party: Despite the Islamicist rhetoric among Welfare parliamentarians who are not of Kurdish descent, Turkish nationalist currents are quite strong.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the constraints emanating from the military and his coalition partner, discussed below, Erbakan, therefore, has had to pursue a timid policy with respect to the southeast since becoming prime minister. He launched a number of trial balloons to test the reaction of his own partisans and the other parties in parliament. Among the most important was the aborted August 1996 attempt to send an intermediary to Öcalan

to explore the possibility that the PKK would abandon the “armed struggle.”<sup>30</sup> The project, which was not kept secret, was immediately vetoed by president Demirel. It is possible that Erbakan, who had no intention of seeking a dialogue with the PKK, deliberately sought a public venue for a set of talks that, given their nature, ought to have been kept secret. He thereby ensured that their failure become public and thus also demonstrated to Kurds in Turkey that he had done his outmost on this issue. Packaged with that effort was an attempt to get the PKK to free Turkish soldiers kept captive by one of his parliamentarians, Fethullah Erbas. The initial attempt to get the soldiers released failed, but Erbas, who is not a Kurd and who hails from Van, succeeded in his second attempt in December of 1996. On the other hand, despite the many hints that the party and the government were about to allow the diffusion of Kurdish-language television<sup>31</sup> little has been done on that score either.

In addition to party unity and consolidation, the Kurdish question poses two serious problems for Erbakan. The first concerns his relationship with the military and the second his foreign policy objectives—especially his desire to improve relations with Iran and Syria. The potential for discord with the military high command (already unsettled by Welfare’s ascension) over this issue has been high from the moment Erbakan took over the reigns of power. To placate them, Erbakan increasingly mirrored the military’s discourse with respect to the conflict, arguing in public that the issue was primarily one of terrorism. He praised and defended the military’s conduct in the southeast.<sup>32</sup> Upon the formation of his government, Erbakan acceded to the National Security Council’s demand that Emergency Rule be extended for another four months in the southeast, something he and his party had strenuously objected to in the past and had always voted against. Eventually, he managed to extract one concession from them when, in November 1996, Mardin Province was left out of the scope of the Emergency Rule. The military has continued operations in the southeast and across the border without any interference from the government, or Erbakan in particular. It is unlikely that there would be any change in this aspect of the policy. After all, neither Erbakan nor the bulk of Welfare have any sympathy for the PKK, which stands in their way to claiming the Kurdish vote and indirectly provides support for the likes of DEP and HADEP.

Continued Syrian and Iranian support for the PKK has embarrassed Erbakan. During his visit to Iran and Iranian president Rafsanjani’s return

visit to Ankara, Erbakan strenuously tried to convince his eastern neighbor to stop harboring the PKK. He has sent signals to the Syrian leadership. He had hoped that his rise to power would convince these two countries to abandon policies they had deemed to be in their national interest in the name of Islamic solidarity. Their lack of cooperation, therefore, has had repercussions on other parts of his agenda and further undermined the little credibility he had with the military.

### **The New Democracy Movement**

The New Democracy Movement (*Yeni Demokrasi Hareketi*) was created by Cem Boyner, a young and charismatic businessman and former head of TÜSIAD, the Turkish Businessmen's Association. Despite its relatively small size, it has had a major impact on the Turkish political scene, even though it fared poorly in the December 1995 elections.<sup>33</sup> As the other nonstatist party, it equally condemns the Turkish state elite for many of the problems created within the country and for its adherence to a narrow basis of Turkish nationalism as the foundation of the state and source of the Kurdish problem. From the beginning, Boyner sought to devolve state power, which in economic and political terms would empower the regions, including the Kurds, to develop their own local policies along their own terms. More important, Boyner had been the single major exception to the public political silence on the Kurdish issue—which in his view cruelly pits all citizens of Turkey against each other at great cost to all. Boyner pushed for the recognition of the Kurdish problem for what it is: a problem of identity. While intolerant of attempts to forcibly alter boundaries or any kind of separatism, he would have done away with the most restrictive of state policies, on issues ranging from cultural rights to local empowerment.

At the beginning of 1995, when it was a movement and not a political party, the New Democracy Movement was greatly feared by center-right parties. Boyner's perceived immunity from prosecution and harassment from the security forces allowed him to explicitly take the state to task for the conflict in the southeast. The character of his discourse, which would have landed anyone else in jail, provided an opening, a political space, in which some of the issues relating to the Kurdish question could and were aired. Boyner, who also took the powerful military establishment head on for the latter's interference in the political process, ultimately got too

closely identified with the Kurdish issue in the public's mind. The New Democracy Movement fell quite short of its most pessimistic expectations in the December 1995 national elections, polling an insignificant 0.5 percent. To be sure, the party was new and had not consolidated itself, and it had unexpectedly to compete with HADEP for Kurdish votes in the southeast, where it had expected to do well.<sup>34</sup> In addition, because of the 10 percent national minimum a party had to obtain to win parliamentary seats, many would-be New Democracy voters chose to cast their votes in a more strategic fashion and not waste them. Still, Boyner's contribution has been of major significance: More than any other politician since former president Özal, he has succeeded in forcing open the Kurdish question quite bluntly, generating some kind of debate and preparing the groundwork for future dialogue.

### **The Turkish Left**

The Turkish Left in the 1970s was the major force in spawning the PKK; violence was the vocabulary of a great portion of the Left and much of the Right. Today a few fringe leftover movements on the extreme Left still pursue violence in Turkey; while violence has escalated in the last few years, it is still far from the scale of the 1970s. The Left today is divided into roughly three groups, whose views differ somewhat on the Kurdish problem. The extreme radical left, which seeks the overthrow of the Turkish state, views the PKK with sympathy as a force willing to practice violence against the state. In fact, this radical Left admires the PKK because it has succeeded in doing what the Turkish Left has not been able to do: for over a decade, to conduct a successful guerrilla campaign against the Turkish military. As a result, some Turkish radical leftists have, over the years, joined the PKK. The Turkish radical Left, with the exception of one group in Tunceli, is primarily an urban phenomenon. As much as it admires the PKK, the urban violent Left has both benefited from the PKK and suffered as well. While the PKK created an atmosphere of chaos that has encouraged this violent Left, it has also been the primary cause for the massive expansion in the nation's security services, which, in turn, have the capability of focusing on all kinds of groups. This radical Left has managed to build a small following and it gained notoriety with the prison hunger strikes of 1996, which resulted in the deaths of twelve inmates before the incoming government of Erbakan negotiated a compromise. The most

important of the radical leftist groups is the DHKP, the Revolutionary People's Liberation Army, which has an active presence among Turks living in Europe. On December 22, 1996, the PKK and the DHKP signed a joint statement calling for "a common revolutionary front." By and large, the DHKP and other similar urban-based organizations that conduct violent operations against members of the security services remain marginal.<sup>35</sup>

Turkey's internationalist Left identifies itself with other leftist movements in Europe, essentially of a social-democratic nature. Today this group is represented by the Republican People's party (CHP) (which, in turn, is the product of a 1995 union between the CHP and SHP). It is drawn toward protection of human rights and civil liberties, hence to a lessening of the power of the state, especially its security organs. The internationalist Left is the primary segment of Turkish society likely to respond more positively to Kurdish calls for national and/or cultural rights. These left-of-center parties regularly speak out for human rights and the amendment of the more repressive articles of the Turkish constitution and penal code. These parties' close ties to European socialists have rendered them sensitive to European criticisms of Turkish human rights policies and the treatment of the Kurds. Social democrats have spearheaded efforts, spurred on by the 1995 negotiations on Turkey's accession to the European customs union, to bring Turkey more into accord with European standards.

The CHP has advocated the recognition of cultural rights and has displayed increased sensitivity to human rights concerns. Some of its members have been in the forefront of struggles to get the security services to be more respectful of citizens', and especially of prisoners', rights. Some also challenged the behavior of the security services in the east and south-east, attracting the ire of the security chiefs. On the Kurdish question, the party, nonetheless, suffers from the fact that, in addition to being Atatürk's original party (and hence the originator of the policy of assimilation), it has vacillated a great deal on its approach. While still a separate party, the SHP at first dismissed some of its Kurdish MPs in 1989 for having publicly discussed the Kurdish issue abroad and having participated at a Paris conference on the same topic. Later, under pressure from the remaining MPs of Kurdish extraction, it issued a report on the southeast in July of 1991 that was quite conciliatory to their concerns. As discussed in an earlier section, it also constructed an electoral alliance with HEP at the onset of the 1991 elections.

This inconsistency became even more pronounced when the party

served as the True Path party's junior coalition partner from 1991 onward, until the end of 1995. This period coincided with the worst of the repression in the southeast; not only were HEP and DEP closed down, but human rights violations in the east and southeast also reached their peak, as the army and security forces stepped up the campaign against the PKK. Party leaders concede that they were incapable of moderating the hardline policies of their partner, and especially of prime minister Tansu Çiller, who had replaced Demirel. Still, the SHP/CHP earned the wrath of the security services. Special team personnel even threatened the minister of state for human rights, the CHP member Algan Hacaloglu, during one of his visits to the southeast.<sup>36</sup> The Istanbul security chief, Necdet Menzir, went so far as to publicly accuse incumbent CHP ministers of aiding and abetting the violent groups battling the state.

Of all the mainstream parties, the SHP/CHP promised the most to the Kurds, but it was unable to deliver much. It is because of this gap between promises and deeds that, despite its more flexible philosophy, the party forfeited all credibility with the Kurdish populations.<sup>37</sup> Unable even to formulate a cohesive social democratic platform acceptable to the population at large, CHP experienced one of its worst defeats in the 1995 elections, as constituency after constituency abandoned it. It barely made it past the 10 percent national barrier. Perhaps as a consequence of this, the party decided to revisit the Kurdish issue by publicizing another Kurdish report in July of 1996. Prepared by the former minister for human rights, Hacaloglu, the report is a reconfirmation that CHP believes in the primacy of political solutions that recognize the existence of a Kurdish identity.<sup>38</sup>

There is also a nationalist Left in Turkey, whose roots draw upon longstanding Atatürkist and statist traditions. These groups, represented today by former prime minister Bülent Ecevit's Democratic Left party (DSP, Demokratik Sol Partisi), see patriotism in terms of loyalty to the idea of the Turkish state and the Atatürkist nation-building project. The DSP and Ecevit in particular are strongly wedded to a centralized unitary Turkish state. Any Kurdish entreaty—political or cultural—is perceived as a direct challenge to their formulation of the state. Intellectuals from these groups are unapologetic about the use of state power to preserve ideological conformity within the state, and they view both the Kurds and the Islamist movement as equal threats to the traditional vision of the Turkish state and its future.

Thus Ecevit has taken a strong nationalist position explicitly on the

Kurdish issue and is not likely to show sympathy to the notion of according the Kurds greater rights. For Ecevit, the issue is simply the result of economic underdevelopment and the feudal structure of the southeast and east, where the aghas wield an inordinate amount of power and influence. Therefore, with land reform and state investments in a variety of economic enterprises, the southeast and east would not suffer from terrorism—assuming of course that the external sources of support for the PKK are also dealt with. Unlike most of his colleagues on the international Left, Ecevit does not acknowledge the separate ethnic identity of the Kurds. In fact, he tries to avoid the use of the word *Kurd* as much as possible, arguing that “one cannot be a leftist and point to the racial components of an economic and social problem.”<sup>39</sup>

As is the case with Erbakan, Ecevit views the Iraqi Kurdish problem and its impact on Turkey as an attempt by the forces of imperialism (read the U.S.) to divide up first Iraq and then Turkey. He has been as implacable as Erbakan in demanding the elimination of OPC and the lifting of sanctions on Saddam Hussein. In parliamentary debates on the extension of OPC, Ecevit has been able to play an increasingly influential role, given the distribution of seats among the different parties. In April 1996 he proposed a “Regional Security Plan,” which included the creation of a security belt in Iraqi territory, to replace the U.S.-led OPC.<sup>40</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Mümtaz Soysal, another leading figure of the Turkish parliamentary Left, known for his nationalist ideas and who briefly served as foreign minister in 1994, defected from the internationalist RPP to Ecevit’s DSP on the eve of the 1995 national elections.

In the 1995 elections, Ecevit and his party, with 14.7 percent of the vote, emerged as the single largest formation on the Left, eclipsing the Republican People’s party. The party’s gains reflect not only the CHP’s difficulties—its coalition with DYP and corruption scandals—but also Ecevit’s reputation as a “clean” politician. His party has lacked an organizational base, which has raised question marks regarding its long-term future. Should the party gain further strength, especially at the expense of CHP, it will considerably strengthen the hardline elements on the Kurdish question.<sup>41</sup>

## The Right

The Right is divided, on the one hand, between the mainstream parties, the True Path party (Dogru Yol Partisi, DYP) and the Motherland party

(Anavatan Partisi, ANAP), and the extreme nationalist Nationalist Action party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) of former colonel Alparslan Türkeş. While both mainstream parties have espoused similar ideas on the issue, it is the DYP, as the ruling coalition member in the 1991–1995 period which has had the more responsible role for articulating and implementing the policy on the Kurdish question.

In the years she was prime minister (1993–1995), Çiller chose to make “antiterrorism” the primary basis of her policy on the Kurds. On the eve of the 1994 municipal elections, she also engineered the eviction of members of the pro-Kurdish DEP from Parliament. The party, as the heir of both the Democrat and Justice parties of earlier decades, has always represented conservative rural and urban interests, especially those of western Turkey. It is particularly strong in regions where agriculture is commercialized and among western Anatolian commercial and industrial establishments. In the Kurdish areas it has made deals with some of the tribal leaders that have allowed it to win seats. The Kurdish insurrection and revival of the identity issue has caught the DYP unprepared. The party has steadfastly maintained that “there is no ethnic problem in Turkey, but a terror problem.”<sup>42</sup> It was not until 1996 that anyone in the party had attempted to develop alternative strategies to the problem. Both Demirel, the party founder, and his successor, Çiller, have toyed with reformist propositions, only to abandon them quickly in the face of the slightest sign of resistance. It is Çiller who, in the process of establishing her control over the party apparatus and expelling Demirel loyalists, brought some of the hardliners in the civil and military bureaucracy into DYP.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, among the mainstream parties, it is the one most committed to seeking a military solution to the Kurdish question. However, from June 1996 to June 1997, the DYP found itself in the awkward situation of being a minority party in coalition with the Welfare party, whose approach to the Kurdish question is radically different. When Welfare sought to find intermediaries to engage the PKK, the DYP initially equivocated, with some of Çiller’s lieutenants responding positively.<sup>44</sup> But pressure from party hardliners and the military eventually brought the party back into line.<sup>45</sup>

A traditional DYP ally unhappy with the conduct of the counterinsurgency is the business community, especially the larger industrialists. They have increasingly come to regard the insurgency not only in financial terms—and hence its impact on the rate of inflation—but also in the dam-

aged relations with Europe and the United States. They have not, however, prevailed in influencing the party's positions in this regard.

The Motherland party (ANAP), by contrast, has in recent years pursued a line typical of opposition parties—that is, it has sought to oppose government policy when convenient without articulating a coherent viewpoint of its own. It is only with the onset of the 1995 national elections that ANAP decided to formulate an explicit policy on the Kurds; it sought to differentiate itself from the DYP by emphasizing the need to recognize the cultural distinctiveness of the southeast and the need to find a nonmilitary solution to the problem. One of its leading figures, Korkut Özal, the brother of the former president, even stated that he would be willing to talk to Öcalan himself if it would guarantee a peaceful resolution. On the other hand, in the fall of 1995, ANAP also played the role of spoiler by seeking to block measures designed to “democratize” the constitution and the penal code—indispensable to a solution to the Kurdish problem—at the time when Turkey was trying to improve its chances for accession to the customs union with the European Community, which it subsequently gained.

In the brief spring 1996 interlude when he was prime minister in the short-lived ANAP-DYP coalition government, party leader Mesut Yilmaz put forward proposals outlining some of the reforms he was planning to undertake. Just like the Welfare party, ANAP also made use of its ethnic-Kurdish parliamentarians to conduct studies in the southeast. One three-member delegation visited the region in early 1996 and recommended the liberalization of cultural and educational restrictions, along with the easing of the military presence.<sup>46</sup> Yilmaz himself declared that prohibitions on the Kurdish language would be removed.<sup>47</sup> This issue, however, took a backseat to intercoalition squabbling between ANAP and DYP, with which Yilmaz shared power. In the end, his promises of more democracy and a peaceful solution came to naught.

ANAP, in effect, enjoys a degree of freedom of action that other parties do not have, and it can always wrap itself in the mantle of Özal, who created and led the party. Even though during Özal's last years Yilmaz emerged as one of his opponents, the Özal legacy is a powerful instrument. Özal's legacy does not always play to ANAP's strength in this matter: Özal's interest in attracting as many different political tendencies as possible when creating the party has meant that ANAP contains liberals as well

as extreme nationalists close to the Nationalist Action party. These nationalists have restricted party leader Yılmaz's room to maneuver.<sup>48</sup>

The late Alparslan Türkeş's Nationalist Action party (MHP) is a classical neo-fascist party with an uncompromising stand on the Kurdish issue. In the past, at the forefront of the battle against the Left, it set its sights on the Kurds. As in the past, it has sought to infiltrate the state apparatus—and it has succeeded in doing so, especially in the security services. During Tansu Çiller's 1991–1995 tenure as prime minister, the MHP acted as her silent partner and, in exchange, was allowed unprecedented access to state institutions. Its fervently nationalist Turkish rhetoric has meant that it has been a primary beneficiary of the violence instigated by the PKK. The MHP's ranks are reportedly strengthened with each body bag that returns to the village of Turkish inductees from the war with the PKK. Having managed to place its militants in the quasi-military "Special Teams" (*özel timler*), which operate in the east and southeast with impunity, the MHP has also been, even if indirectly, one of the principal participants in the violence. In the 1995 elections, believing that it would do well on its own, the MHP declined an offer of alliance with Prime Minister Çiller. Although it garnered a respectable 8.3 percent of the vote, displaying its growing strength, it did not manage to overcome the 10 percent barrier needed to obtain parliamentary representation. Nonetheless the impact of its rhetoric on national policy is quite considerable.<sup>49</sup>

The MHP and Türkeş have repeatedly stressed the "scientific fact" that Kurds are "descendants of Turkish tribes" and resisted the notion that Turkey is composed of a mosaic of peoples. While the party leadership must be cautious about its public statements, at the private level MHP members often exhibit an extreme chauvinism and one that is absolutely determined to deny any Kurdish identity within Turkey. Still, in public Türkeş has berated all those who have suggested that a political solution ought to be sought, and he has even threatened to spill blood to prevent it.<sup>50</sup>

Another right-wing nationalist formation is the Greater Unity party (BBP), an off-shoot of the MHP. Ideologically, they occupy the space between the MHP and the Welfare party: They are both Islamists and extreme nationalists. Led by Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, the party has also taken a strong stand against any political solution to the Kurdish question. Interestingly, because the party was formed by right-wing elements interned by

the military hierarchy during the 1980–1983 interregnum, unlike the MHP it does not exude the same kind of confidence in the officer class.

### **Turkish Civil Society**

Turkish civil society is the most developed among all Muslim states of the Middle East. Private groups and organizations are widespread, and their numbers are growing, but their indirect role vis-à-vis the political system is still evolving. The main problem is that they are still too timid to take on the state on an issue as controversial as the Kurdish question. Although major strides have been made by the Turkish government toward accepting the explicit existence of Kurds by the growing use of the word in public discussion in recent years, the magnitude of military operations against the PKK has created a quasi-war situation in which questions about the goals of the war can possibly call into question one's patriotism—a situation not unknown in other countries. Successive Turkish governments over the past years have encouraged nationalist elements to frame the issue precisely as one of patriotism—witness the widespread campaign undertaken by many newspapers, collecting donations for Turkish troops in the southeast and northern Iraq in March and April of 1995 under the slogan “let's back our boys” (*Mehmetçikle el ele*). The campaign had an intimidating effect on anyone inclined to raise questions about the nature, wisdom, or efficacy of the military operation.

### **General Public Opinion**

Understandably, Turkish public opinion has grown less tolerant and more anti-Kurdish over the past decade, as the magnitude of the military struggle has grown. Many families have now lost sons in the army to the conflict, and many parents speak with great anxiety about their sons' early due dates for military service and the risks they entail. Bodies have been coming back from the southeast on a regular basis; at the height of the insurrection, the number of coffins brought to the main Kocatepe Mosque in Ankara for funeral ceremonies before being sent back home would sometimes reach ten a day. While over time the impact of casualties could in principle lead to a popular desire for policy change on the Kurdish issue, so far it seems only to have strengthened right-wing opinion, which is convinced that Turks are more willing to suffer casualties than the softer

Americans. As noted earlier, the extremely nationalist Nationalist Action party (MHP) can only be bolstered by the phenomenon of dead Turkish boys coming home from the front.

Reaction has not been limited to the nationalist Right. There has also been a resurgence in Kemalist secular nationalism in reaction both to Kurdish nationalism and to the rise of Islamic forces and parties. There is an irony, as one author has suggested—with some hyperbole—in the fact that the emergence of the PKK and its terror tactics in the 1980s have done more to define the Turkish identity than seventy years of republican policies aimed at the homogenization the population.<sup>51</sup>

The PKK has itself considered the pros and cons of adopting a policy of total polarization of the population in Turkey. In the past it has sought to publicize its cause and carry it to the mainstream Turkish population via terrorism—especially bomb attacks in the big western cities of Istanbul and Izmir and in major tourist locations such as Antalya. The PKK has reportedly taken credit for these operations, which do indeed polarize the population and create visceral hatred between Turks and Kurds. In one sense, from a harsh PKK point of view, this might be an arguable strategy, if the goal were total separation of the two communities. But it is extremely ill-considered, since the Kurds themselves will be ultimately the biggest losers if urban Turkish workers decide to carry out acts of vengeance against the Kurdish population in western cities and towns. Extreme radical Kurds and extreme Turkish nationalists might share a common goal here, but fortunately both have been restrained from the most violent acts. The PKK mainstream says that it has no quarrel with the Turkish people, only with the state, but even a few urban terrorist acts like this give the lie to that contention.

The ease with which public opinion can be aroused was evidenced in the reaction to the manufactured flag incident at the HADEP convention in June of 1996. Still, in view of the length of this conflict, intercommunal incidents have been kept to a minimum. While many such events have taken place,<sup>52</sup> at times instigated by the news media or local authorities, there is genuine confusion about Kurds within mainstream Turkish public opinion. To begin with, this is a relatively new issue as far as the public is concerned. After all, the very concept of any separate Kurdish identity had been ridiculed for many years as a deliberate feature of state policy; the government has propagated over the years the ideas that Kurds are really just “mountain Turks,” that Kurdish is a dialect of Turkish (whereas struc-

turally they are totally unrelated), and that even if Kurds speak a different language, it is debased and not a serious vehicle for communication—hence it is foolish to demand special linguistic rights. By contrast, those Kurds who attempt to raise the issue peacefully or seek state recognition of their identity are portrayed as traitors, separatists, or terrorists. When all Kurdish political activism is automatically identified with the PKK, terrorism, and separatism, dialogue within society becomes impossible.

At this point, the state has created for itself one of the single biggest obstacles to future dialogue: the formation of public opinion that finds the concept of “Kurdish identity” absurd, unnecessary, and subversive, and that all who talk about Kurdish rights are terrorists and enemies of the nation. But because the issue is relatively new to the public, it is also malleable. While the Kurds may be a notable exception, given the size of their population, Turkey has other minorities who have not necessarily articulated any demands but who have always been conscious of their hyphenated nature. The saliency of the Kurds has raised their consciousness. Because of the hard-nosed attitude of state officials, the role of other civil society institutions becomes even more crucial in delimiting the parameters of the Kurdish problem and its resolution.

### **Intellectuals and the Private Sector**

So much of the debate on the Kurdish question has been framed by the perception that it represents an existential threat to Turkey’s well-being. Therefore, it is not surprising that the debate in general has been rather muted. The combination of laws that tend to punish speech and the strong sense of patriotic duty imbedded in the Turkish public inhibits a great deal of criticism. This is not to say that there are not pockets of opposition.<sup>53</sup> By and large, intellectuals as a class, especially academic circles, play almost no useful political function, because of their failure to examine and question Kurdish policies. University students do not usually argue over Kurdish issues in class, and faculty do not discuss it among themselves. The issue is functionally nonexistent in academic circles—meaning that a critically important segment of society that is equipped to examine this Turkish social problem is a nonparticipant in stimulating a national conversation.

To be sure there are some notable and brave exceptions to this generalization, but they have been insufficient to sustain a meaningful national dialogue. This situation is not apparently the result of any specific formal

government policy; it simply stems from a feeling that it is prudent not to question too openly. Among the more prominent intellectuals, novelists Yasar Kemal and Orhan Pamuk have often expressed their opposition to the military approach to the problem. Yasar Kemal, a Kurd by birth who only recently began to identify himself publicly with the Kurdish struggle, and his younger colleague Pamuk have relied on their international fame to protect them from judicial action. This has not stopped the State Security Courts from charging Kemal with sedition for articles he has published, resulting in the self-exile of this international figure. But such actions are counterproductive internationally because they tend to draw more attention than the Turkish government is willing to tolerate. Some artists, on the other hand, have taken risks on their own, by challenging conventional attitudes and sanctions.<sup>54</sup>

This is not to say that there is no debate in Turkey. There are internationally linked organizations, such as the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, that have offered Turkish intellectuals a modicum of protection.<sup>55</sup> Another non-governmental organization created for the explicit purpose of searching for common ground between Turks and Kurds living in Turkey is TOSAV, Toplum Sorunlarini, Arařtırma Vakfi or Foundation for the Research of Societal Problems. It too gets its funding from the European Union and the United States. Individuals in academia have spoken out on this question in newspaper articles, and journals such as *Birikim* and *Türkiye Günü* have discussed the problems associated with both Turkish and Kurdish identity formation. The Kurdish question has also given rise to other debates in which the Kurds may not figure directly in prominent fashion. One such debate, influenced by the difficulties the state has had recently with the Kurds, has been on a presumptive "Second Republic," a discussion on recasting the state. As the Islamist thinker Abdurrahman Dilipak has suggested, there are three social forces behind the push for a renewal of state institutions: the Islamists, the Kurds, and the business community.<sup>56</sup>

Islamist intellectuals have received the greatest boost from the reemergence of the Kurdish question. They, unlike their secular counterparts, have an alternative to offer which, in the short term, appears to be non-threatening to state interests. On the other hand, the Islamist agenda as a whole clearly represents a fundamental challenge to the Kemalist establishment. Because they stress the unity of the two peoples (and of other Muslims as well) within the confines of an Islamic society and abhor the notion

of ethnic differences, they possess a natural advantage over their secular counterparts, who can construct a resolution only through compromises along ethnic lines. But are the modern-day Islamist intellectuals and their movements a mirror image of the left wing of the 1970s, for whom the Kurds were nothing but cannon fodder in their struggle against the capitalist system? The Kurdish question has opened another front for the Islamists in their struggle with secularism. As one Islamist thinker openly confesses, as a Muslim, he takes delight in the fact that the Kurdish issue has created the possibility for society to rid itself of this “despotic” Kemalist regime, even though he grieves for all the lives that are being lost in the process.<sup>57</sup> Secular intellectuals challenging the state’s official policy have written columns in daily newspapers, but, as will be discussed later, they have had remarkably little impact on policymaking.

Until recently, other segments of society, such as lawyers or businessmen, had not formally stimulated public discussion of these issues either, although many as individuals have spoken out occasionally in the press. Local bar associations in the southeast and Kurdish lawyers in the main cities have been quite active, although they are focused primarily on human rights cases. Human rights foundations have also taken up the cause of individuals imprisoned or tortured by the system. These lawyers have gone about their business in the face of considerable personal risk, as many have disappeared.

More recently, however, Turkish business has begun to openly criticize the rationale behind a military campaign that has burdened the treasury. As such, businessmen have become one of the most liberal elements in Turkey in seeking a political (nonmilitary) solution. Their motivation is purely pragmatic: They are aware of the significant financial drain on the budget and the inflationary impact that the military campaign in the southeast causes. They are also well aware that the conflict has had negative consequences on Turkey’s international standing, and that it may have even come close to endangering the accession to the European Customs Union.

The first attempt at an institutional study of the southeast came from the Istanbul-based Economic Development Foundation (Iktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı, IKV). In a far-reaching report, IKV’s then head, Sedat Aoglu, discussed a series of economic, social, and cultural reforms, including the creation of institutes for the study of Kurdish and TV and radio broadcasts in Kurdish.<sup>58</sup>

The IKV report was followed by one commissioned by the Turkish

Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), the main quasi-official business organization, to which almost all businesses belong. Unlike the IKV report, the TOBB study, because of its methodology and the importance of the institution issuing it, achieved an unprecedented amount of notoriety. IKV was a small foundation that occupied itself mainly with European Union-related concerns, while the TOBB was intimately linked with the state and leading personalities in the center-right parties. Similarly, Sakip Sabanci, one of the two most influential business leaders, also issued a report on the southeast, in which he argued that money alone would not solve the problems of the area and that Turkey had to look at other countries, namely Spain, Britain, and Italy, to learn how to deal with these kinds of ethnic problems.<sup>59</sup> Halis Komili, then leader of TÜSIAD, proclaimed in 1995 the Kurdish question to be Turkey's most severe quandary, saying that without a solution to it, other problems would not be resolved.<sup>60</sup> In January of 1997, TÜSIAD issued a wide-ranging report on the need to deepen the process of democratization in Turkey in which it advocated a number of measures designed to alleviate the cultural and other inequities Kurds face.<sup>61</sup> These concerns of the business circles and interest in a pragmatic approach were best reflected in the genesis of the New Democracy Movement of Cem Boyner, mentioned above, the single most outspoken politician of prominence in the country on this issue. Boyner's efforts also gave an impetus to other young businessmen who have joined the fray: The Young Turkish Businessmen's Council (TÜGIAD) organized missions to the southeast and issued reports advocating a change in the approaches to that region.<sup>61</sup>

All these reports and efforts by individuals have resulted in greater political space in which to discuss these issues, even though they have not yet succeeded in changing policy. Nonetheless, intellectuals and business classes remain the most potent source of opposition to and influence on government policy.

## **The Media**

The Turkish press is one of the most open in the Middle East today, embracing a wide spectrum of views from far left to fundamentalist Islamist and proto-fascist nationalist. Yet this relatively free press has not been so open when it comes to the Kurdish issue, or indeed any issue that directly touches on the national security. It appeared as if most of the press

took its guidance on national security issues from the official bulletins of the government, the military, and the National Security Council. Most coverage of fighting was contained in relatively brief stories about the number of PKK terrorists who were captured or killed the day before, or about terrorist incidents carried out by the PKK. Since there was no formal national debate in Parliament or elsewhere about the Kurds, there was no serious debate in the press either, even though this is not, strictly speaking, a government-controlled press. With the exception of columnists, the press finds it safer to avoid probing discussions of the problem; most journalists describe it as “self-censorship,” which can often be more stifling on a specific issue than review by a state censorship board.

All is not in solid conformity, however, even in the mainstream press. An important distinction has to be made between the reporting end of the news and columnists. Nearly every day in one paper or another—most often in the more liberal or intellectual papers, or even in the Islamist press—there are analyses or pieces by columnists who take a more critical and thoughtful approach to the Kurdish problem, not directly critical of government policy but reflective on the broader nature of the problem. There is almost an indirect relationship between the level of PKK activities and the ability of columnists, as well as others, to discuss nonmilitary solutions to the Kurdish question. The best such example came about during the cease-fire of 1993, when newspapers were full of stories on the PKK, which—while mostly negative—did not exhibit the hard edge they usually do. The level of discourse in the news media seems also improved when the security apparatus has succeeded in reducing PKK activities. In other words, periods of a weakened PKK threat seem to encourage the freest discourse. This fact may also explain why, over the course of last two years, a gradual, but perceptible, relaxation in the press coverage has taken place. Undoubtedly, the revelations regarding many state-related scandals that implicated senior security officials have encouraged journalists to take greater risks.

On the reporting side of the Kurdish question there is little in the form of investigative journalism, and few attempts are made to question official versions of events, even when more than one version exists. Still, there are exceptions: Even *Milliyet*, a serious paper known for its unsympathetic coverage of things southeast, in the summer of 1995 carried a week-long series on the problems of refugees from the southeast. It left little doubt about the dimensions of the human tragedy and the broad demographic

extent of the problem, employing many color pictures of camps, displaced persons, and so forth, even though there was no direct analysis of the deeper roots of the Kurdish problem per se. Turkey's most serious paper today, *Yeni Yüzyil*, is bolder in its critiques of the Kurdish problem than any other mainstream paper. In August 1995 it carried a seven-day series of interviews with Yasar Kemal, Turkey's most famous novelist, himself a Kurd and long-time leftist (although he himself had not chosen to speak out much on the Kurdish issue until the last year). The interview was singularly harsh in its condemnation of state policies against the Kurds from the inception of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s, and in its demands for rights for Kurds. The Islamist press has, in general, been bolder in its criticisms of state policy, whether in its conceptualization or daily conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

There has always been an active Kurdish press, mostly in the Turkish language, although all through the 1960s and 1970s it was continuously harassed and often closed. The magazine with the longest run was one published by Kemal Burkay and his associates in the Socialist party of Turkish Kurdistan. It lasted from the end of 1974 till January 1979.<sup>63</sup> In the 1990s, a number of small dailies were published. These, which included *Özgür Ülke* (Free Country), *Özgür Gündem* (Free Agenda), and *Yeni Politika* (New Politics), concentrated on news from the southeast. They were subjected to judicial campaigns and even were the object of terror and arson attacks, their correspondents and distributors arrested and sometimes killed.<sup>64</sup> At first subjected to censorship by the state, they were later closed down by court order. This was especially true of *Yeni Politika*, which often appeared with huge empty spaces where a news story—but not its headline—had been censored and marked out by bold black lettering reading “censored,” until it was closed down by court order in late fall 1995. By December 1995, a new daily, *Demokrasi*, with a decidedly more moderate tone, had emerged to replace it. (Interestingly, *Yeni Politika* is still printed in Europe under the name of *Özgür Politika* and has a broad circulation among Turkish Kurds in Europe.) Paradoxically, the emergence of Med-TV has cut into the circulation of Kurdish dailies such as *Demokrasi*, as people prefer to watch rather than read.

State control over the press, apart from self-censorship, is usually effectuated by allowing papers in principle to print what they want, but then reviewing them after the fact in the courts for revealing national secrets or distributing separatist propaganda.<sup>65</sup> Where security courts find violations

they impose serious fines separately on both the paper and the writer of the offending article and confiscate the offending publication. In 1995, 1,443 publications (56 books, 784 journals, 602 newspapers, and 1 bulletin) were confiscated on court order.<sup>66</sup> These fines are generally inordinately high. The writer is also technically subject to prosecution as well. So the penalties for transgressing state policies on the Kurdish issue are considerable.<sup>67</sup> Papers that enjoy much advertising from state-run institutions can also be threatened with loss of advertising. The result is that most papers and most writers prefer not to move too far into the area of bold new coverage and probing analysis.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, many of the popular papers would not pursue such a line in any case, since they purvey a strongly anti-Kurdish line that further hardens public opinion against the Kurds and their “separatism.”

The intellectual weakness of the press as an institution was further revealed with the publication of the TOBB-commissioned report conducted by Ankara University professor Dogu Ergil in the summer of 1995. This important, if flawed, report, based on extensive interviews among Kurds, revealed that most Kurds in the southeast do not want a separate Kurdish state. This “TOBB Report” was one of the first of its kind, explicitly dealing with sensitive issues. It was something of a bombshell when it hit the press, sparking widespread discussion and debate, and the potential for a deeper understanding of this sensitive issue. Despite some constructive criticism, however, the debate in the end touched very little on the substance of the issue and the implications for policy. Instead, most columnists and politicians weighed in on ad hominem attacks against the author of the report, Dogu Ergil—some of it quite scurrilous—or against the methodology, or even against the intent behind the preparation of such an analysis. Who authorized this report? What right did the Union of Chambers of Commerce have to delve into these issues, which are outside of its purview? Was not the intent of the research clearly to vindicate the PKK? Are there not some connections between the report and the CIA? In the end, the publication of the TOBB Report has been valuable in opening up, at least slightly, the arena of public debate on the Kurdish issue, even if the media and public response were disappointing.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the discouraging weakness of the press in Turkey, individual journalists reflect in private much greater sensitivity to the issue than is

expressed in the news media, even in the more conservative papers. If the state were to change its laws and regulations, more balanced treatment would certainly emerge. The most notorious law in this respect is "Article 8" of the Anti-terrorism Law, which states that anything that serves to support separatism, *intentionally or unintentionally*, can be subject to prosecution. Such broad wording leaves almost any writer vulnerable to action. Article 8, though amended in the days prior to Turkey's accession to the European Customs Union, still allows the continued prosecution of nonviolent speech.<sup>70</sup>

No discussion of the media in Turkey would be complete without some mention of television. In recent years Turkish electronic media have undergone a revolution; the government monopoly of radio and television has been broken, allowing dozens of new radio and television stations to emerge, with a broad spectrum of views, independent of government control. Some of the greatest impact has come from the emergence of talk shows, typically starting around 10 P.M. and lasting until 2 A.M. or sometimes even later.<sup>71</sup> In addition, some of the new stations are primarily local, creating the possibility for dissemination of diverse views with a distinctly local perspective.

This kind of TV coverage has probably contributed more to creating a debate on the Kurdish problem than even the print media—and more boldly, and with a much wider following. Indeed, many commentators have pointed out that programs like "Political Forum" have become a virtual substitute for the Parliament, which has conspicuously failed to discuss this issue of such national importance. This aspect of the media's role is quite heartening, and could obviously be further encouraged by the state if it lifts some of its more restrictive legislation.

However, resisting this trend are the state-controlled media, specifically the radio and television stations. State TV has become the official purveyor of the most uncompromising line on the Kurdish issue. It still refuses to talk of Kurds. It regularly broadcasts what at best can be called crude propaganda pieces, arguing that Kurds are a Turkish tribe and that Kurdish is an invented language.<sup>72</sup> State TV and radio, insofar as they reflect the dominant views of the bureaucracy and military, demonstrate the gulf that exists between civil society and the state.

Ironically, many Kurds in Turkey speak with some bitterness about news media attention to the crises of the Bosnian Muslims and Chechnya.<sup>73</sup>

Turkish press and television coverage has been widespread on Bosnian developments, with pictures of refugees, camps, orphans, and campaigns to help in Bosnia. Yet Kurds believe that the government is encouraging the news media to focus on Bosnia as a distraction from Turkey's internal problems in the southeast. They point out—incorrectly—that the military campaign within Turkey is far greater than in Bosnia, that more Kurds have died than Bosnian Muslims; they claim that there are many millions more Kurdish refugees than Bosnian, and wretched camp conditions that at least parallel those in Bosnia. The heavy media focus on the Bosnians, while maintaining silence on the Kurds at home, is deeply angering to Kurds, who feel it is deliberate and degrading to ignore the even greater suffering of Turkey's own citizens.<sup>74</sup> In sum, the media have not fulfilled the kind of role in the Kurdish debate one might have hoped from a rather free press. But the possibilities for a constructive and creative press role are there, just beneath the surface, if bold and thoughtful leadership will encourage it. Turkey, in effect, is ready to evolve much more rapidly in developing the kinds of capabilities that will enable national debate and a new consensus to emerge. Rabid nationalism, to be sure, can also exploit the media, but there need not be a single voice. The news media can rapidly come to play an important new role in the solution of the Kurdish problem in Turkey—something utterly lacking in almost any other state in the Middle East in the handling of its urgent ethnic and sectarian issues.

### Notes and References

1. Military interventions have occurred several times in the last three decades, but the military in each case has eventually voluntarily restored power to civilian politicians and political parties; the military also recognizes that future intervention will come at ever higher cost to itself.
2. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Vol. 8, (Sıra Sayısı 651), October 18, 1994.
3. *Ibid.* The parliamentarian, Esat Canan, went even further by arguing that because the PKK had managed to obtain support from the population by using force, the state ought not imitate this tactic to win the population to its side.
4. See the remarks by Bahri Zengin, a member of Welfare purported to be close to Erbakan, in Helsinki Yurttaslar Meclisi, *Kürt Sorunu İçin Baris Insiyatifi* (A Peace Initiative for the Kurdish Question) (Istanbul: Helsinki Yurttaslar Meclisi, n.d.), 69; also see Bahri Zengin, "Çarpiklik Nerde?" (Where is the deformity?) *Aksam*, September 21, 1994.

5. Selami Camci, "Refah Partisi ve Kürt Sorunu: Sorun, Tartismanin Disinda Tutuluyor" *Yeni Safak*, August 12, 1996.

6. Hüsnü Aktas, "Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Kürt Meselesi" (The Kurdish issue from Ottoman times to today), *Akit*, July 22 and 29, 1996.

7. Ali Bulaç, "Kürtlerin Geleceği" (The future of the Kurds), *Yeni Safak*, July 31, 1996.

8. Ali Bulaç, "Bazi Sorulara Cevaplar" (Some answers to questions), *Yeni Safak*, August 1, 1996.

9. See Bulaç's response in Metin Sever, *Kürt Sorunu: Aydınlarımız ne Düşünüyor?* (The Kurdish question: what do our intellectuals think?) (Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1992), 99-100.

10. Abdurrahman Dilipak, "Kürtler Türklerin Hangi Boyu Idil" (The Kurds belonged to which of the Turkish tribes) *Akit*, September 18, 1996. Another author advances the same argument about the bankruptcy of the nation state, specifically the Turkish one. He points out that the Kurds who lived peacefully within the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years are now demanding their identity in the context of the nation-state system. Sükru Kaner, "Kürt Sorunu ve Ulus-Devlet'in Iflasi" (The Kurdish question and the bankruptcy of the nation state) *Millî Gazete*, June 27, 1994.

11. Selami Camci, "Refah Partisi ve Kürt Sorunu: Milliyetçi Eğilimler Yokedilemez" (The Welfare Party and the Kurdish question: nationalist tendencies cannot be destroyed) *Yeni Safak*, August 14, 1996.

12. See for instance, Mustafa Özcan, "Kürt Enstitüsü" (Kurdish Institute), *Yeni Safak*, December 12, 1996.

13. Necmettin Erbakan, for instance, in an October 10, 1993, speech devoted mostly to the Kurdish problem, not only did not shy away from defining the problem as Kurdish (his speech was actually entitled, "Terror, the Kurdish Problem and the Southeastern Question"), but he also enumerated many of the grievances of the region's inhabitants. Rusen Çakir, *Ne Seriat, Ne Demokrasi* (Neither Shari'a nor democracy) (Istanbul: Metis Yayinlari, 1994), 156-157.

14. *Zaman*, August 25, 1994.

15. *Millî Gazete*, July 7, 1996.

16. *Yeni Yüzyil*, March 23, 1996.

17. A 1991 report of the Kurdish question that discussed the issues in an open and frank manner never saw the light of day. For a summary, see Çakir, *Ne Seriat, Ne Demokrasi*, 151-155.

18. There has, in fact, been a proliferation of reports, of different shades, from Welfare's ranks that enable Erbakan to pick and choose among them depending on circumstances. This is far more than other parties have done. In another report, prepared by a Diyarbakir parliamentarian of Kurdish origin, the emphasis was on purely economic solutions (*Millî Gazete*, November 18, 1996).

19. See for instance, Mehmet Metiner, "Refah'in Güneydogu'ya Iliskin Duyarliligi" (Welfare's sensitivity vis à vis the southeast), *Millî Gazete*, August 27, 1994; and "RP'li Heyetin Güneydogu Raporu" (Welfare Party delegation's report on the

southeast) *Millî Gazete*, August 28, 1994. Other Islamist authors have argued the same positions in other papers as well as *Millî Gazete*, which serves as Welfare's mouthpiece.

20. Hamit Bozarslan, "Political Crisis and the Kurdish Issue in Turkey."

21. For a list of the provinces, see Çakir, *Ne Seriat, Ne Demokrasi*, 218. Comparable figures for the 1989 and 1991 elections, when the party did better than in 1977, are seven and one, respectively. The poor performance in 1991 is the result of Welfare's electoral alliance with the Turkish nationalist parties and the electoral alliance formed by HEP with the Social Democrats and SHP.

22. Soon after coming to power in the summer of 1996, Welfare began exploring ways in which TV broadcasts in Kurdish could be aired in the southeast (*Yeni Yüzyil*, July 29, 1996).

23. From Fethullah Erbas's speech in a parliamentary debate. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Vol. 68, October 18, 1994, 394.

24. Many in Refah believe that the only reason HADEP was allowed to run the December 1995 elections despite "its known connections to the PKK" was to block the ascendancy of the Islamists. For one version of this, see the article by one of Welfare's high command, S. Ârif Emre, "HADEP Taktigi Suyu Düştü" (The HADEP maneuver did not succeed) *Millî Gazete*, June 27, 1996. Also Mehmet Sertpolat, "Güneydoğu'ya Bir Baska Açidan Bakmak" (The southeast from a different viewpoint) *Millî Gazete*, February 4, 1996.

25. Isin Çelebi, *Siyasette Kilitlenme ve Çözüm* (Deadlock in politics and its solution) (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayinlari, 1996), appendix 3. Bingöl is the only province in which, in 1995, Welfare obtained a majority of the votes cast, with 51.6 percent.

26. Their leader, Hasim Hasimi of Diyarbakir, exploded a small bombshell when he urged the creation of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq, something that not only the military and the mainstream parties abhor but that Erbakan and the rest of Refah also have repatedly opposed. see Hasimi's interview with Ali Bayramoglu in *Yeni Yüzyil*, July 22, 1996. Hasimi, under pressure from his party, had to later renounce some of the statements made in that interview.

27. Dissension among the Kurdish ranks became public on the eve of Welfare's 5th Congress, at which they tried to display their displeasure at the government's lack of action in the southeast (*Radikal*, October 16, 1996).

28. Ironically, when Erbakan became prime minister in June 1996, he agreed to an extension of OPC and, thereby, avoided a conflict with these parliamentarians. Eventually, the force was renewed under another name and with somewhat different characteristics, in December 1996.

29. Rusen Çakir, "Refahiyol ve Güneydoğu: Ummetçilikten Devletçilige" (The Welfare-TPP coalition and the southeast: From Muslim communitarianism to statism) *Milliyet*, July 28, 1996.

30. The primary protagonist in the effort was an Islamicist author and surprisingly an Alevi, Ismail Nacar, who, with an Islamist human rights organization, Mazlum-Der, was to contact the PKK (*Sabah*, August 3, 1996, *Hürriyet*, August 6, 1996).

31. *Yeni Yüzyil*, July 29, 1996.

32. This even included defending the National Security Council's controversial report, leaked to the press, in which means of reducing fertility among Kurds were debated. Given the high birth rates, the fear expressed by the NSC was that Kurds would make up 40 percent of the population by 2010, and 50 percent by 2025. For details of the report, see, *Milliyet*, December 18, 1996.

33. Boyner resigned from the party's leadership in 1966.

34. In an April 1995 survey, 11 percent of Kurdish speakers among those polled declared their preference for the New Democracy Movement. In this poll of city dwellers, HADEP was not listed as an option. See International Republican Institute, *Turkey, Survey Results: Attitudes and Priorities of City Dwellers* (Washington, D.C.: International Republican Institute, 1995), 50.

35. They have occasionally attacked prominent establishment figures as well, such as in the case of the Sabancı family, owners of one of the two largest industrial and financial concerns.

36. Fatih Çekirge, "Özel Tim Hacıoğlu'nu Tehdit Etti" (Special teams have treated Hacıoğlu) *Sabah*, August 9, 1995.

37. In the 1995 parliamentary elections, CHP enlisted the veteran Kurdish politician Serafettin Elçi to lead its list of candidates in the Kurdish province of Sirnak. Even Elçi could not save the Social Democrats; he was soundly defeated, coming in fourth.

38. *Milliyet*, July 21, 1996.

39. For him, the mere mention of the word *Kurd* has "racist" connotations, while the problem in the southeast has no ethnic or racial origin. See interview with Nilgün Cerrahoglu, *Milliyet*, February 18, 1996. The arch-nationalism of Ecevit has led many to nickname him Alparslan Ecevit, a reference to the late extreme right-wing politician Alparslan Türkeş. *Ibid.* By contrast, Ecevit has been at the forefront of those arguing for the distinct rights of the Turcoman minority in northern Iraq, who are ethnically close to Turks.

40. "Demokratik Sol Partinin 'Huzur Sağlama Harekati' Yerine Önerdiği Bölgesel Güvenlik Planı" (The Democratic Left party's proposed regional security plan in lieu of Operation Provide Comfort) (Ankara: Demokratik Sol Parti (mimeo), 1996).

41. In the coalition government which replaced the Welfare-True Path party one in June 1997, Ecevit not only emerged as deputy prime minister, but also as the cabinet member with overall responsibility for the southeast. The new government's overtures on the southeast have been true to Ecevit's rhetoric: The focus is completely on the economic side and requires greater involvement by state institutions.

42. See former Interior minister Nahit Mentese's remarks in Parliament regarding the southeast. Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Vol. 68, October 18, 1994, 401.

43. Among them are Mehmet Agar, former chief of national security; Ünal Erkan, former supergovernor of the provinces ruled by emergency decree; Necdet

Menzir, former head of the security services in Istanbul; and Hayri Kozakçioğlu, another former supergovernor. The latter two have resigned from the party to protest the coalition with Erbakan's Welfare party.

44. Party vice president, Mehmet Gölhan, initially signaled his approval (*Hürriyet*, August 6, 1996).

45. *Milliyet*, August 7, 1996.

46. *Yeni Yüzyıl*, March 13, 1996.

47. *Yeni Yüzyıl*, March 23, 1996. For a skeptical view of Yılmaz's promises, see Ali Bayramoğlu, "Kürt Sorunu ve Yılmaz" (The Kurdish question and Yılmaz), *Ibid.*

48. Kurdish members, for instance, were upset that in the elections for party leadership positions, Turkish nationalists seemed to have gained at their expense (*Yeni Yüzyıl*, August 27, 1996). Even Özal could not always hold his Kurdish constituency completely in line. See interview with Nurettin Yılmaz, former Mardin representative and Özal supporter, who rebelled against Özal following a Turkish military incursion into northern Iraq (*Nokta*, August 18, 1991).

49. Türkeş died on April 4, 1997. It remains to be seen what influence his successor, Devlet Bahçeli, will have.

50. *Milliyet*, December 5, 1994. Türkeş criticized Sakıp Sabancı, the prominent industrialist who urged alternative solutions to the problem (*Milliyet*, October 6, 1995).

51. Mümtaz'er Türköne, "Kürt Kimliği: Çözüm Nerede?" (Kurdish identity: Where is the solution?) *Türkiye Günlüğü* 33 (March–April 1995), 31.

52. The town of Erdemli in the province of İçel was the scene for such an intercommunal incident when a fight between two individuals ended with the death of one and a subsequent riot that saw the destruction of many businesses (*Yeni Yüzyıl*, March 11, 1996).

53. There have been occasional bold attempts, such as the volume organized by Metin Sever (*Kürt Sorunu: Aydınlarımız ne Diyor?*), in which numerous intellectuals discuss their vision of the problem. Some in that volume, such as Asaf Savas Akat, went so far as to advocate a dialogue with the PKK (see p. 13).

54. The singer Ahmet Kaya, for instance, performed on Med-TV.

55. See, for instance, the report published by the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly summarizing discussions at its February 1992 meeting (Helsinki Yurttaşlar Meclisi, *Kürt Sorunu İçin Barış İnsiyatifi*). In addition, the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly has initiated sister city programs that link towns in the Southeast with others around the nation.

56. Metin Sever and Cem Dizdar, eds. *İkinci Cumhuriyet Tartışmaları* (Discussions on the second republic) (Ankara: Basak Yayınları, 1993), 403–4.

57. Yılmaz Yalçiner, "Sedat Bucak'ı İzlerken . . ." (Following Sedat Bucak . . .) *Akit*, November 23, 1996.

58. *Sabah*, November 7, 1994. Sedat Aloglu, who was elected as a DYP parliamentarian in the December 1995 elections as an ally of Tansu Çiller, reissued the İKV report, this time under his own name, at a DYP Istanbul party organization

meeting on April 6, 1996. In both cases he has argued that the distinctiveness of Kurdish ethnicity ought to be accepted and can no longer be questioned ("Dogu ve Güneydogu" [The east and the southeast], mimeo, 9). Dogan Güres, the former hardline chief of staff and parliamentary colleague of Aloglu, has endorsed this report; he claimed to have agreed with 90 percent of its content (Hasan Cemal, "Dogan Güres Pasa'dan: Terör Baska Kürt Baska, Bunu Görmek Lazim!" (General Dogan Güres: We must see the difference between terrorism and Kurds) *Sabah*, April 13, 1996).

59. *Hürriyet*, September 30, 1995. For his efforts, Sabanci was investigated by the State Security Court.

60. *Hürriyet*, December 22, 1995. Another influential businessman reiterated the same thoughts in an interview with the English daily, in which he blames the high rate of inflation on two factors, one of which is the quasi-war in the southeast, and urges the state to seek nonmilitary solutions. Interview with Can Paker, CEO of Türk Henkel, *Turkish Daily News*, December 23, 1995, B1.

61. The report went well beyond the Kurdish issue. While TÜSIAD called on the state to allow people to freely name their children, teach Kurdish and broadcast in Kurdish it also questioned the democratic legitimacy of military-based institutions, such as the National Security Council. TÜSIAD, *Türkiye'de Demokratikleşme Perspektifleri* (Istanbul: TÜSIAD, 1997).

62. Murat Bekdik, "Güneydoguda Çözüm İçin 'Anlayış Reformu' Gerekli" (A solution to the Southeast is only possible through a reform of the mindset), *Zaman*, December 6, 1996. Also see *Milyet*, September 3, 1996.

63. For a discussion of the Kurdish press, see Kemal Burkay, *Geçmişten Bugüne Kürtler ve Kürdistan* (The Kurds and Kurdistan: From the past to today), Vol. 1 (Istanbul: Deng Yayinlari, 1992), 267-73.

64. Mark Muller, "Nationalism and the Rule of Law in Turkey: The Elimination of Kurdish Representation during the 1990s," in *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in the 1990s*, ed. Olson, 184.

65. The National Security Council decided in 1995 to increase the pressure on extreme left-wing and right-wing, as well as separatist, publications, so much so that it was decried by an influential and moderate columnist as nothing but censorship. See Oktay Eksi, "MGK, yoksa aklini mi yitirdi?" (Has the National Security Council lost its mind?) *Hürriyet*, July 27, 1995.

66. U.S. State Department, *Turkey: Human Rights Report, 1996*.

67. Nothing seems to escape the notice of the State Security Courts. On April 4, 1997, the presenter on Environment Radio (Çevre Radyosu) was sentenced to a prison term for a program aired on that radio station that questioned the state's version of a massacre in which a number of village guards had been killed. The station had interviewed the families of the dead men (*Anadolu Ajansi*, April 4, 1997).

68. Another worrisome development is the extent to which large corporations in control of media empires have used their assets in pursuit of political and economic gains. This became painfully apparent during the 1995 election campaign

when *Sabah*, reputed to have received a large infusion of credit from the Çiller government, unabashedly supported the government, while *Milliyet* and *Hürriyet* did exactly the opposite, backing the ANAP. Lost in the heat of the debate was the fact that both sets of newspapers, as well as others, twisted the facts and engaged in exceedingly biased coverage, further damaging the little credibility they may have had on these issues.

69. One interesting aspect of the TOBB Report was that it was commissioned by TOBB Chairman Yalim Erez, a close confidant of Prime Minister Çiller, and elected as a member of Parliament from Mugla in the December 24, 1995, election. It is inconceivable to think that the report was commissioned and published without her advance knowledge. Yet the prime minister denied any knowledge and expressed her own doubts about the methodology behind the report. Still, the report proved to be a useful—if only temporary—vehicle to start a national discussion on the issue.

70. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, *Turkey: Torture and Mistreatment in Pre-Trial Detention by Anti-Terror Police* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1997), 40.

71. In late 1994, the weekly discussion program “Siyaset Meydani” (Political Arena) devoted a session to problems in the southeast that commanded immense public attention and lasted until seven in the morning. It was seen across Turkey, including a massive viewership all over the southeast. Other programs have talked about various aspects of the Kurdish problem, with some caution but nonetheless quite openly, with many points of view represented in the debate. The on-again, off-again *Siyaset Meydani* is watched regularly by 34 percent of city dwellers according to one survey. International Republican Institute, *Turkey, Survey Results: Attitudes and Priorities of City Dwellers*, 59.

72. Ertürk Yöndem on “Perde Arkası,” October 12, 1994, quoted in Koray Düzgören, “Türkiye’nin Kürt Çıkmazı: Sorunun Tanımı ve Gerçekler” (Turkey’s Kurdish dead-end: Its definition and realities) in Seyfettin Gürsel et al., *Türkiye’nin Kürt Sorunu*, 13.

73. For instance, see Alınak, *HEP, DEP, ve Devlet: Parlamento’dan 9. Kogusa*, 220.

74. Similarly, Kurds were very affected by the Turkish response to the Bulgarian government’s attempts at eradicating any semblance of Turkish culture in Bulgaria. Ankara understandably began a campaign against the communist rulers in Sofia, who forcibly tried to slavicide place and even family names in order to compel assimilation. Yet, for Turkish Kurds, the Bulgarian policies were no different than those they had been experiencing. The same applies to harsh Turkish government and press criticism of assimilationist policies against ethnic Turks in Greece—often paralleling Turkish assimilationist policies in the southeast. On a parallel with the Turks of Cyprus, see Server Tanilli, “Kürt Gerçekliği ’ ni Tanimanın Anayasal ve Yasal Gereklere Üstüne bir Taslak” (A proposal on the legal and constitutional requirements for the Kurdish reality) in Türk-Kürt Dostluk Girişimi, *Kürt Sorunu: Aydınlar ne Diyor?* (The Kurdish question: What do intellectuals say?) (Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1994), 102. After reciting Kurdish population figures, Tanilli pointedly asks, “Should such a population not have the same rights as those 100,000 Turks on Cyprus?”